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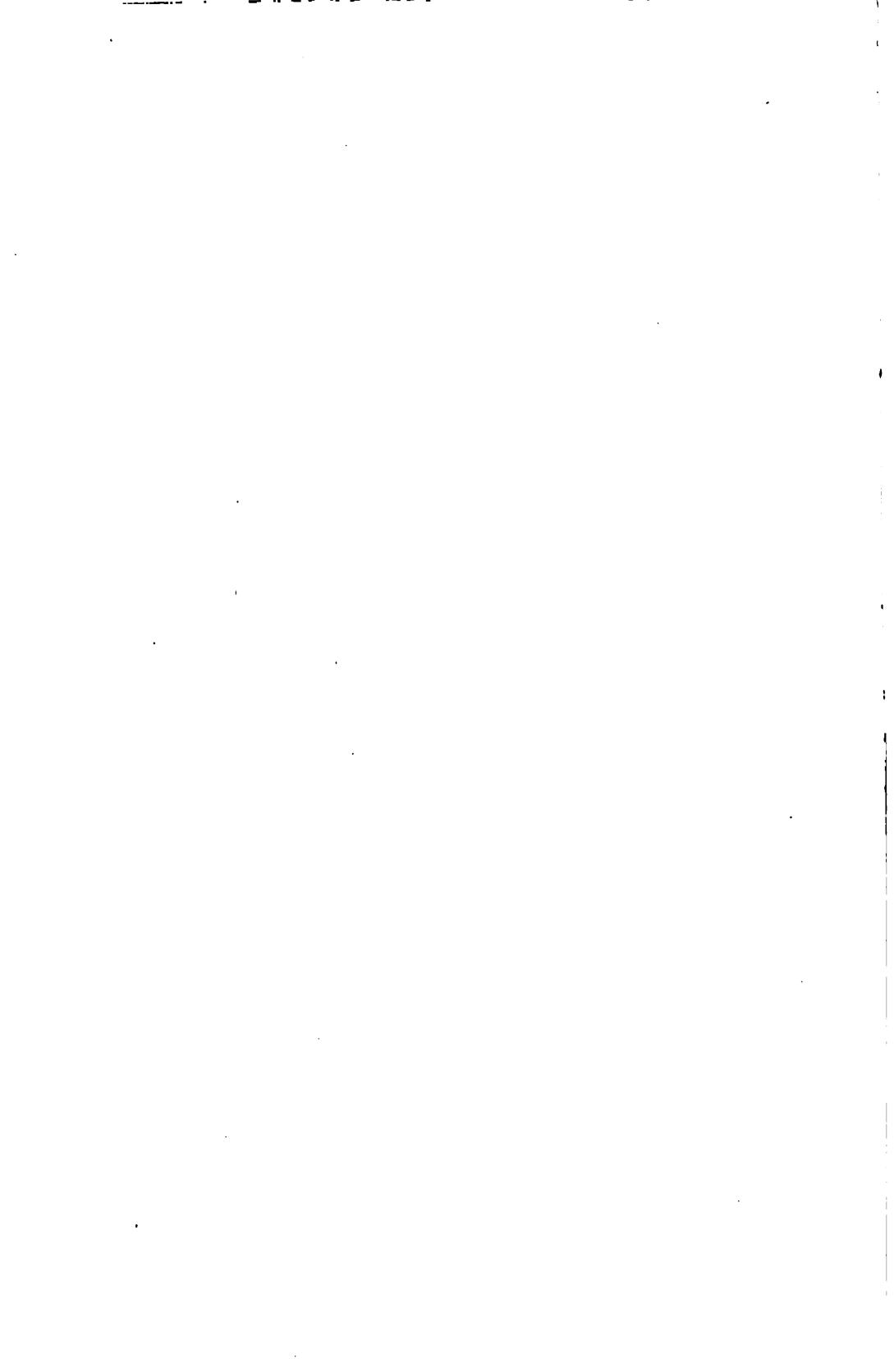
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Goethe on the Theater

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DISCUSSIONS OF THE DRAMA

I

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von
Goethe on the Theater

Selections from the Conversations with Eckermann

TRANSLATED BY

JOHN OXFORD

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

WILLIAM WITHERLE LAWRENCE



Printed for the

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

In 1823, nine years before Goethe's death, Johann Peter Eckermann, a young man in his early thirties, journeyed on foot from Hanover to Weimar in order to meet face to face the poet and dramatist, whose works he had deeply admired. He was cordially received, and soon became an almost daily visitor at Goethe's house. His modest and gentle disposition, and his genuine enthusiasm for literature and art, and particularly for the drama, seem to have endeared him to the aging poet, who admitted him to an intimacy denied to far abler men. Eckermann's somewhat passive nature was no doubt more agreeable than a more assertive character would have been. Despite his mental vigor, Goethe was in his last years frequently unwell, and there are occasional hints in the 'Conversations' of the ruses which he adopted to avoid wearying himself with uncongenial visitors. Probably, too, he had a shrewd idea that this sensitive adorer might

transmit to posterity a portrait worth the having, and more flattering than one from the hand of a more vigorous artist. Many years before, Goethe had met Madame de Staël, who made no secret of the fact that she intended to immortalize their conversation in print. But Goethe was repelled rather than stimulated by the brilliant Frenchwoman, and he might well have feared that the outlines of a likeness of himself etched by her hand would be unduly sharpened. Certainly he had nothing of the sort to fear from Eckermann. He knew quite well what his disciple was doing; the writing and publication of the 'Conversations' was agreed upon by the two men some years before Goethe's death. It was a happy inspiration; few books throw more light upon the convictions of Goethe's maturity, or give a more vivid impression of his personality.

The literary reputation of Eckermann himself rests solely upon this work. He had, at various times in his life, grandiose plans for literary achievement, but such other material as he actually produced is of no consequence. He is interesting solely as the interpreter of Goethe. Altho he was well fitted by tem-

perament for this task, he was indifferently educated. Born of peasant parents, he had, by virtue of his quickness as a child, received schooling superior to his station, but the necessity of earning his own living prevented him from following his scholarly inclinations. After some experience in the army, and in a subordinate governmental post, he finally enrolled at Göttingen as a student of law. But, as he says in the little account of his early life which he has left us, he was like a maiden, who finds good reason to object to a proposed marriage because she cherishes another in her heart. Eckermann's real love was not law, but poetry and the drama. He had also bestowed his affections upon a girl, Johanna Bertram, whom Goethe does not seem to have encouraged him to marry. Even when he did marry her, in 1831, after many years of waiting, his devotion to Goethe and his frequent visits at the poet's house seem hardly to have been interrupted. During all these years, his means of making a living were somewhat precarious. Altho he asserted with vigor that he was not Goethe's secretary, but his pupil and co-worker, his services seem to have been in part those of liter-

ary assistant, with the customary remuneration. He also gave lessons to English visitors and residents in Weimar, which helped him to gain a knowledge of English and an ability to read the English classics—a valuable addition to his incomplete education. Six years after Goethe's death he was made Librarian to the Grand-Duchess in Weimar, with the title of Court Councillor; and in this pleasant sinecure lived out the remaining years of his life until his death in 1854, a gentle, conceited, unimportant man, to whom the reflected glory of a great personality has lent a kind of immortality.

Eckermann was not a Boswell; the 'Conversations' have not the vigor and piquancy of the immortal biography of Johnson. Nor does Goethe appear before us with the directness and sincerity of the great lexicographer. Despite many charming glimpses of the poet's home life in Weimar, of his kindness of heart and simplicity of taste, there are constant suggestions that he is posing for his admirer and for posterity. One must take Eckermann's record of their intimacy, too, with a grain of salt. The entries in Goethe's own diary are singularly laconic when com-

pared with the enthusiastic expressions in Eckermann's pages. Goethe had been too long in the public eye to reveal himself without reserve. But this very element of calculation gives to his views an authority and finality which less considered utterances might have lacked. It is here, indeed, that the greatest value of the 'Conversations' lies. They are chiefly important as a record of Goethe's convictions on a wide variety of subjects. In recording these utterances, in reproducing dialog, Eckermann was singularly happy. Goethe's personality stands forth with wonderful vividness, and his words, even when oracular, seem easy and unconstrained. We can forgive the occasional self-satisfaction with which the biographer sets down his own views beside those of his master, in view of the greater naturalness which they lend to the dialog. And if Eckermann has not the alluringly inquisitive toadiness of a Boswell, he is not too colorless a character to engage the sympathy and interest of the reader on his own account. But there are no other full-length portraits, not even of Goethe's family. An occasional visitor passes before our eyes, but he is only

sketched in. Eckermann saw only his idol; he was not the man to portray a variety of personalities. It is only fair to add that neither the visitors to Weimar nor the dwellers in the little grand-ducal capital were at all comparable to the brilliant circle which gathered about Johnson and is immortalized in the pages of Boswell.

The biographer's chief passion was for the theater—a passion so intense that Goethe has many a sly hit at his friend's ardor. The Weimar theater in the decade before Goethe's death, while far from having the renown which the activity of Goethe and Schiller had earlier lent to it, was a good one as the times went, and it was supported with considerable enthusiasm. One of the most interesting passages in the 'Conversations' describes the fire which destroyed the building in 1825, and there are further accounts of the new structure immediately planned and erected to take its place. The Weimar theater had once before, like the phoenix, arisen from its ashes. A fire in 1774 had consumed it; and the new playhouse, the so-called 'Altes Theater,' shown in the old prints as a long barrack-like building of two stories, with a small

portico in front, was the scene of most of Goethe's practical experience with the drama. A consideration of his connection with the stage, then, must deal chiefly with his career as director of this theater.

When Goethe came to Weimar in 1775, at the invitation of Duke Karl August, he found a pleasure-loving court devoted to stage-plays, but possessing no regular theater. Private dramatic entertainments were a favorite form of amusement, and much care was lavished upon elaborate pieces in which the court circle took part. In these amateur theatricals Goethe naturally became prominent. He had shown himself to be a writer of distinction, and he was manifesting much executive ability in the affairs of the duchy. So when the theater was finally built and opened for dramatic performances, Goethe was made director. The expenses of its maintenance were chiefly borne by the Duke; while the public was provided for, it was essentially a house for the court and the intellectuals. Actors of ability were engaged, and great care was taken with the production of ambitious works. Over all these performances Goethe ruled with a rod of iron.

From 1800 on, the genius of Schiller co-operated with that of Goethe in making the Weimar theater memorable. The untimely death of his brother-poet was a great blow to Goethe's interest in the active stage, but he continued as director, though not in full activity, until 1817, when an unlucky quarrel with the Duke caused his retirement, together with that of his son August, who had recently become associated with him in the direction of the theater. The rawness of the breach with Karl August was soon salved over, but it was an unfortunate end to Goethe's distinguish career as a theatrical manager, and a melancholy break in a long and intimate friendship. Karl August, though ruling over a duchy small in territory, had made it notable through his own ability and the talents of the men whom he had gathered about him.

The theater under Goethe's direction was, however, by no means wholly successful. The trouble seems to have been that he was primarily a poet rather than a playwright, and that as a director he often sacrificed theatrical effectiveness to other considerations.

Like Byron, whom he greatly admired, and like Tennyson and Browning, Goethe wrote much which was unsuited for production on the stage, tho cast in dramatic form. With all his greatness, he belongs in a different category from Shakspere or Molière, or even from Holberg or Goldoni, in that his plays are often not essentially dramatic. He was much occupied with moral issues, with setting forth an ideal; and he was much concerned in reviving masterpieces of the past, and in imitating the technic of great dramatists of other countries and other ages. He apparently allowed himself to forget that drama lives because it tells a story effectively, in a manner suited to the audience, and to the playhouse in which it is acted. His 'Iphigenia,' modeled upon Greek tragedy, is a noble work, despite its long speeches and lack of action; but it suffers in the modern theater because the audience lacks that intimate acquaintance with the story which enabled the Greeks to concentrate their attention upon motivation and upon analysis of character. His 'Götz von Berlichingen,' one of his best plays, obviously influenced by the

chronicle-histories of Shakspere, cuts the action up into many scenes, an arrangement easy enough upon the bare stage of the Elizabethans, but unsuited to the more elaborate scenery of modern days, which must be shifted for each change of locality. Goethe dreamed of founding a German drama, as he tells Eckermann, and to that end wrote 'Iphigenia' and 'Tasso,' but was disheartened at the lack of enthusiasm in his audience. He criticised Lessing for choosing the quarrels of Saxony and Prussia as a background for 'Minna von Barnhelm,' but it was a wiser choice for an audience of German people than episodes of classical tragedy or Renascence idealism. Goethe's greatest work, 'Faust,' is a perfect illustration of great drama which is unsuited to the theater. The Second Part, though often given in Germany, needs only to be seen on the stage to be adjudged a piece to be read; and the First Part, with all its glorious poetry, and with all the effectiveness of single scenes, is really a succession of episodes rather than a connected drama. It lacks the cohesion which binds together even the loosest

of Shakspere's dramatic romances, like the 'Winter's Tale' or 'Cymbeline.' The plays of Schiller are far superior to those of Goethe in dramatic effectiveness, but even Schiller was not wholly free from the fault which has just been noted. Goethe himself speaks in the 'Conversations' of the difficulty which Schiller experienced in subduing his material to dramatic form. The soaring imagination of each great poet was hardly to be confined within the somewhat arbitrary limits of dramatic technic. It may be questioned whether some of Goethe's plays which are given in Germany at the present day would not have lost their place in the play-house long since, were it not for the greatness of Goethe as a master of literature, and the piety with which the Germans regard even the minor works of a genius. Probably few Germans would agree with Scherer's conclusion that Goethe lackt the fiber of a dramatist.

It is interesting to observe that if Goethe was not always successful in practice, he was generally correct in precept. He recognized very clearly the difficulty of composition for

the stage. Upon this point he express himself in no uncertain terms to Eckermann. "Writing for the stage," he said, "is an art by itself, and he who does not understand it thoroly had better leave it alone. Every-one thinks that an interesting fact will appear interesting in the theater—nothing of the kind! Things may be very pretty to read, and very pretty to think about; but as soon as they are put upon the stage the effect is quite different, and what has charmed us in the closet will probably fall flat on the boards. When one reads my 'Hermann and Dorothea,' he thinks it might be brought out at the theater. Töpfer has been inveigled into the experiment, but what is it, what effect does it produce, especially if it is not played in a first-rate manner? And who can say that it is in every respect a good piece? Writing for the stage is a trade that one must understand, and requires a talent that one must possess. Both are uncommon, and where they are not combined, we shall scarcely have any good result." Such suggestive observations as these on the business of play-making and play-producing are scattered

thru the 'Conversations.' Goethe loved to crystallize his knowledge into pungent phrases, but he perceived clearly the futility of attempting to reduce theatrical management to a series of aphorisms. "The theater," he says in a short paper on the Weimar stage, "is one of those affairs which can least of all be managed according to rules; one is entirely dependent upon the times in which he lives and upon his contemporaries. What the author chooses to write, the actors to perform, and the public to hear—these are the things that tyrannize over the directors of theaters, and in the face of which they can preserve hardly any will of their own." The history of the Weimar theater scarcely bears this out. Goethe was, it appears, rather a tyrannical director himself; his imperious will often aroused opposition. Possibly the very force of the circumstances of which he speaks—the demands made by author, actors, and public—roused his naturally vigorous temperament to a more intense activity.

To select for reprinting passages which deal with only one subject does an injustice

to the 'Conversations' as a whole. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Goethe was the variety of his interests and the diversity of the pursuits in which he attained distinction. Of this versatility and virtuosity the 'Conversations' give a very striking illustration. The keenest interest in art, letters, science, politics, and philosophy is there revealed. It is the record of a mind of the widest sympathy with many different forms of human endeavor. The picture is no doubt too much idealized; we know well enough that Goethe was neither a saint nor a demigod, but a man with many human weaknesses. But we can forgive some suppression of his defects in the general truth of the portrait drawn by Eckermann. The 'Conversations' indeed confirm Napoleon's terse characterization of Goethe—an unconscious echo of Antony's words over the dead Brutus, and doubly significant because of Napoleon's own intellectual eminence—"Voilà un homme!"

* * * * *

John Oxenford's translation of the 'Conversations,' completed midway in the nineteenth century, while not without faults, is

fairly adequate.* The original German, which would sometimes be clumsy if rendered literally into English, is often paraphrased, with a slight flavor of mid-Victorian elegance quite in keeping with Eckermann's rather conscious style. The present editor has taken the liberty of making a few alterations, in order to secure greater accuracy, clearness, or smoothness.

It seems incomparably the better plan to arrange the 'Conversations' in the order in which they are reported as having taken place, irrespective of the date of their appearance in print. To indicate the arrangement in the original editions serves only the purpose of the special student of Goethe-bibliog-

* 'Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret, translated from the German by John Oxenford.' Revised edition, Bell and Sons, London, 1913. The original edition of Oxenford's work appeared in 1850. A useful critical edition of the original is that by Dr. H. H. Houben: 'Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens, von Johann Peter Eckermann.' Brockhaus, Leipzig, 1909. The first German edition of the 'Conversations' was published in two volumes in 1836. In 1848 Eckermann added a third volume containing additional material, some of it furnished by a Swiss gentleman named Soret, who had been a frequent visitor at Goethe's house. A translation of some portions of the 'Conversations,' by Margaret Fuller, was published in 1839.

raphy. In general, only those passages which have a direct bearing on the drama are here reprinted; altho no attempt has been made to include them all. Enough of the narrative of life in Weimar has been given to make the discussions of the theater and its people more vivid and comprehensible.

The purpose of the present selections is not to offer a commentary on Goethe, or on the theatrical conditions of his day; its aim is rather to bring together in convenient form the dramatic convictions of a great poetic genius, who was both a prolific writer for the theater and a dramatic director of long and varied experience. This volume was projected, the selections made and revised, and the introduction written before the war. Very few alterations, none of any consequence, have since been made. It is worth remembering that Goethe's attitude towards questions of political morality in no wise agrees with that of his countrymen in the present generation.

WILLIAM WITHERLE LAWRENCE.

GOETHE ON THE THEATER

GOETHE ON THE THEATER

1823

Tuesday, October 14th. This evening, I went for the first time to a large tea-party at Goethe's. I arrived first, and enjoyed the view of the brilliantly lighted apartments, which, thru open doors, led one into another. In one of the furthest, I found Goethe, who came to meet me with a cheerful air. He was drest in black, and wore his star, which became him so well. We were for a while alone, and went into the so-called "ceiling room" (*Deckenzimmer*), where the picture of the Aldobrandine Marriage, which was hung above a red couch, especially attracted my attention. On the curtains being drawn aside, the picture was before my eyes in a strong light, and I was delighted to contemplate it quietly. . . .

Goethe himself appeared very amiable in society. He went about from one to another,

and always seemed to prefer listening and hearing his guests talk, to talking much himself. . . .

He came to me with Frau von Goethe. "This is my daughter-in-law," said he; "do you know each other?"

We told him that we had just become acquainted.

"He is as much a child about a theater as you, Ottolie!" said he; and we exchanged congratulations upon this taste which we had in common. "My daughter," continued he, "never misses an evening."

"That is all very well," said I, "as long as they give good lively pieces; but when the pieces are bad, they try the patience."

"But," said Goethe, "it is a good thing that you cannot leave, but are forced to hear and see even what is bad. By this means, you are penetrated with the hatred for the bad, and come to a clearer insight into the good. In reading, it is not so—you throw aside the book, if it displeases you; but at the theater you must endure."

Saturday, October 25th. We talkt of the theater, which was one of the topics which chiefly interested me this winter. The

'Erdennacht' of Raupach was the last piece I had seen. I gave it as my opinion that the piece was not brought before us as it existed in the mind of the poet; that the Idea was more predominant than Life; that it was rather lyric than dramatic; and that what was spun out through five acts would have been far better in two or three. Goethe added that the idea of the whole turned upon aristocracy and democracy, and that this was by no means of universal interest to humanity.

I then praised those pieces of Kotzebue's which I had seen—namely, his 'Verwandtschaften,' and his 'Versöhnung.' I praised in them the quick eye for real life, the dexterity at seizing its interesting sides, and the occasionally genuine and forcible representation of it. Goethe agreed with me. "What has kept its place for twenty years, and enjoys the favor of the people," said he, "must have something in it. When Kotzebue contented himself with his own sphere, and did not go beyond his powers, he usually did well. It was the same with him as with Chodowiecky, who always succeeded perfectly with the scenes of common citizens' life, while if

he attempted to paint Greek or Roman heroes, he failed."

Goethe named several other good pieces of Kotzebue's, especially 'Die beiden Klingsberge.' "No one can deny," said he, "that Kotzebue has lookt about a great deal in life, and kept his eyes open.

"Intellect, and some poetry," continued Goethe, "cannot be denied to our modern tragic poets, but most of them are incapable of an easy, living representation; they strive after something beyond their pqwers; and for that reason I might call them *forced talents*."

"I doubt," said I, "whether such poets could write a piece in prose, and am of the opinion that this would be the true touchstone of their talent." Goethe agreed with me, adding that versification enhanced, and even called forth, poetic feeling.

1824

Friday, January 2nd. We talkt of English literature, the greatness of Shakspere, and the unfavorable position held by all English dramatic authors who had appeared after that poetical giant.

"A dramatic talent of any importance," said Goethe, "could not forbear to notice Shakspere's works, nay, could not forbear to study them. Having studied them, he must be aware that Shakspere has already exhausted the whole of human nature in all its tendencies, in all its heights and depths, and that, in fact, there remains for him, the after-comer, nothing more to do. And how could one get courage to put pen to paper, if one were conscious, even in a spirit of earnestness and appreciation, that such unfathomable and unattainable excellences were already in existence!"

"It fared better with me fifty years ago in my own dear Germany. I could soon come

to an end with all that then existed; it could not long awe me, or occupy my attention. I soon left behind me German literature, and the study of it, and turned my thoughts to life and to production. So gradually advancing I proceeded in my natural development, and formed myself for the work which from one time to another I was able to produce. And at every step of life and development my standard of excellence was not much higher than what at such step I was able to attain. But had I been born an Englishman, and had all those diverse masterpieces been brought before me in all their power at my first dawn of youthful consciousness, they would have overpowered me, and I should not have known what to do. I could not have gone on with such fresh light-heartedness, but should have had to bethink myself, and look about for a long time, to find some new outlet."

I turned the conversation back to Shakspeare. "When one, to some degree, disengages him from English literature," said I, "and considers him transformed into a German, one cannot fail to look upon his gigantic greatness as a miracle. But if one seeks

him in his home, transplants oneself to the soil of his country, and to the atmosphere of the century in which he lived; further, if one studies his contemporaries, and his immediate successors, and inhales the force wafted to us from Ben Jonson, Massinger, Marlowe, and Beaumont and Fletcher, Shakspere still, indeed, appears a being of the most exalted magnitude; but one arrives at the conviction that many of the wonders of his genius are, in some measure, accessible, and that much in his work is due to the powerful and productive atmosphere of his age and time."

"You are perfectly right," returned Goethe. "It is with Shakspere as with the mountains of Switzerland. Transplant Mont Blanc at once into the large plain of Lüneburg Heath, and you would find no words to express your wonder at its magnitude. Visit it, however, in its gigantic home, go to it over its immense neighbors, the Jungfrau, the Finsteraarhorn, the Eiger, the Wetterhorn, St. Gothard, and Monte Rosa; Mont Blanc will, indeed, still remain a giant, but it will no longer produce in us such amazement.

"Besides, let him who will not believe," continued Goethe, "that much of Shakspere's greatness belongs to his great vigorous time only ask himself the question, whether he thinks so astounding a phenomenon would be possible in the present England of 1824, in these evil days of journals that criticise and destroy?"

Tuesday, March 30th. This evening I was with Goethe. I was alone with him; we talked on various subjects, and drank a bottle of wine. We spoke of the French drama, as contrasted with the German.

"It will be very difficult," said Goethe, "for the German public to come to a kind of right judgment, as they do in Italy and France. We have a special obstacle in the circumstance that on our stage a medley of all sorts of things is represented. On the same boards where we saw Hamlet yesterday, we see Staberle to-day; and if to-morrow we are delighted with 'The Magic Flute,' the day after we shall be charmed with the oddities of the favorite of the moment. Hence the public becomes confused in its judgment, mingling together various species, which it never learns rightly to appreciate

and to understand. Furthermore, every one has his own individual demands and personal wishes, and returns to the spot where he finds them realized. On the tree where he has pluckt figs to-day, he would pluck them again to-morrow, and would make a long face if sloes had grown in their stead during the night. But if any one is a friend to sloes, he turns to the thorns.

“Schiller had the happy thought of building a house for tragedy alone, and of giving a piece every week for the male sex exclusively. But this notion presupposed a very large city, and could not be realized in our humble circumstances.”

We talkt about the plays of Iffland and Kotzebue, which, in their way, Goethe highly commended. “From this very fault,” said he, “that people do not perfectly distinguish between *kinds* in art, the pieces of these men are often unjustly censured. We may wait a long time before a couple of such popular talents come again.”

Sunday, May 2nd. Goethe had sent me this morning a roll of papers relative to the theater, among which I had found some *de-tacht* remarks, containing the rules and stud-

ies which he had carried out with Wolff and Grüner to qualify them for good actors. I found these details important and highly instructive for young actors, and therefore proposed to put them together, and make from them a sort of theatrical catechism. Goethe consented, and we discuss the matter further. This gave us occasion to speak of some distinguished actors who had been formed in his school; and I took the opportunity to ask some questions about Frau von Heigendorf. "I may," said Goethe, "have influenced her, but, properly speaking, she is not my pupil. She was, as it were, born on the boards, and was as decided, ready, and adroit in anything as a duck in the water. She did not need my instruction, but did what was right instinctively, perhaps without knowing it."

We then talkt of the many years he had superintended the theater, and the infinite time which had thus been lost to literary production. "Yes," said he, "I may have missed writing many a good thing, but when I reflect, I am not sorry. I have always regarded all I have done solely as symbolical; and, in fact, it has been pretty much a mat-

ter of indifference to me whether I have
made pots or dishes."

1825

Tuesday, January 18th. Riemer spoke of Schiller's personal appearance. "The build of his limbs, his gait in the street, all his motions," said he, "were proud; his eyes only were soft."

"Yes," said Goethe, "everything else about him was proud and majestic, only the eyes were soft. And his talent was like his outward form. He seized boldly on a great subject, and turned it this way and that, and lookt at it now on one side, now on another, and handled it in diverse ways. But he saw his object, as it were, only on the outside; a quiet development from within was not within his province. His talent was desultory. Thus he was never decided—could never bring things to an end. He often changed a part just before a rehearsal.

"And, as he went so boldly to work, he did not take sufficient pains about *motives*.

I recollect what trouble I had with him, when he wanted to make Gessler, in 'Tell,' abruptly break an apple from the tree, and have it shot from the boy's head. This was quite against my nature, and I urged him to give at least some motive to this barbarity by making the boy boast to Gessler of his father's dexterity, and say that he could shoot an apple from a tree at a hundred paces. Schiller, at first, would have nothing of the sort; but at last he yielded to my arguments and intentions, and did as I advised him. I, on the other hand, by too great attention to motives, kept my pieces from the theater. My 'Eugenie' is nothing but a chain of motives, and this cannot succeed on the stage.

"Schiller's genius was really made for the theater. With every piece he progresst, and became more finisht; but, strange to say, a certain love for the horrible adhered to him from the time of the 'Robbers,' which never quite left him even in his prime. I still recollect perfectly well that in the prison scene in my 'Egmont,' where the sentence is read to him, Schiller would have made Alva appear in the background, maskt and muffled in a cloak, enjoying the effect which the sen-

tence would produce on Egmont. Thus Alva was to show himself insatiable in revenge and malice. I, however, protested, and prevented his appearance. Schiller was a great and wonderful man.

Thursday, February 24th. "If I were still superintendent of the theater," said Goethe this evening, "I would bring out Byron's 'Doge of Venice.' The piece is indeed too long and would require shortening. Nothing, however, should be cut out, but the import of each scene should be taken, and express more concisely. The piece would thus be brought closer together, without being damaged by alterations, and it would gain a powerful effect, without any essential loss of beauty."

This opinion of Goethe's gave me a new view as to how we might proceed on the stage, in a hundred similar cases. . . .

We talkt more about Lord Byron, and I mentioned how, in his conversations with Medwin, he had said there was something extremely difficult and unthankful in writing for the theater. "The great point is," said Goethe, "for the poet to strike into the path

which the taste and interest of the public have taken. If the direction of his talent accords with that of the public, everything is gained. Houwald hit this path with his 'Bild,' and hence the universal applause he received. Lord Byron, perhaps, would not have been so fortunate, inasmuch as his tendency varied from that of the public. The greatness of the poet is by no means the important matter. On the contrary, one who is little elevated above the general public may often gain the most general favor precisely on that account."

We continued to converse about Byron, and Goethe admired his extraordinary talent. "That which I call invention," said he, "I never saw in any one in the world to a greater degree than in him. His manner of loosing a dramatic knot is always better than one would anticipate."

"That," said I, "is what I feel about Shakspere, especially when Falstaff has entangled himself in such a net of falsehoods, and when I ask myself what I should do to help him out I find that Shakspere far surpasses all my ideas. That you say the same

of Lord Byron is the highest praise that can be bestowed on him. Nevertheless," I added, "the poet who takes a clear survey of beginning and end has, by far, the advantage with the experienced reader."

Goethe agreed with me, and laught to think that Lord Byron, who, in practical life, could never adapt himself, and never askt about a law, finally subjected himself to the stupidest of laws—that of the *three unities*.

"He understood the purpose of this law," said he, "no better than the rest of the world. Comprehensibility is the purpose, and the three unities are only so far good as they conduce to this end. If the observance of them hinders the comprehension of a work, it is foolish to treat them as laws, and try to observe them. Even the Greeks, from whom the rule was taken, did not always follow it. In the 'Phaeton' of Euripides, and in other pieces, there is a change of place, and it is obvious that good representation of their subjects was with them more important than blind obedience to a law, which, in itself, is of no great consequence. The pieces of Shakspere deviate, as far as possible,

from the unities of time and place; but they are comprehensible—nothing is more so—and on this account the Greeks would have found no fault with them. The French poets have endeavored to follow more rigidly the laws of the three unities, but they sin against comprehensibility, inasmuch as they show a dramatic law, not dramatically, but by narration."

Tuesday, March 22nd. Last night, soon after twelve o'clock, we were awakened by an alarm of fire; we heard cries: "The theater is on fire!" I at once threw on my clothes, and hastened to the spot. The universal consternation was very great. Only a few hours before we had been delighted with the excellent acting of La Roche in Cumberland's "Jew," and Seidel had excited universal laughter by his good humor and jokes. And now, in the place so lately the scene of intellectual pleasures, raged the most terrible element of destruction.

The fire, which was occasioned by the heating apparatus, appears to have broken out in the pit; it soon spread to the stage and the dry lath-work of the wings, and, as it increased fearfully by the great quantity of

combustible material, it was not long before the flames burst thru the roof, and the rafters gave way. . . .

I saw in beautiful eyes many tears, which flowed for its downfall. I was no less toucht by the grief of a member of the orchestra. He wept for his burnt violin. As the day dawned, I saw many pale countenances. I remarkt several young girls and women of high rank, who had awaited the result of the fire during the whole night, and who now shivered in the cold morning air. I returned home to take a little rest, and in the course of the forenoon I called upon Goethe.

The servant told me that he was unwell and in bed. Still Goethe called me to his side.

“I have thought much of you, and pitied you,” said he. “What will you do with your evenings now?”

“You know,” returned I, “how passionately I love the theater. When I came here, two years ago, I knew nothing at all, except three or four pieces which I had seen in Hanover. . . . All was new to me, actors as well as pieces; and twice, according to your advice, I have given myself up entirely to the

impression of the subject, without much thinking or reflecting. I can say with truth that I have, during these two winters, past at the theater the most innocent and most agreeable hours that I have ever known. I was, moreover, so infatuated with the theater that I not only missed no performance, but also obtained admission to the rehearsals; nay, not contented with this, if, as I past in the daytime, I chanced to find the doors open, I would enter, and sit for half an hour upon the empty benches in the pit, and imagine scenes which might at some time be played there."

"You are a crazy fellow," returned Goethe, laughing; "but that is what I like. Would to God that the whole public consisted of such children! And in fact you are right. Any one who is sufficiently young, and who is not quite spoiled, could not easily find any place that would suit him so well as a theater. No one makes any demands upon you; you need not open your mouth unless you choose; on the contrary, you sit quite at your ease like a king, and let everything pass before you, and recreate your mind and senses to your heart's content. There is

poetry, there is painting, there are singing and music, there is acting and what not besides. When all these arts, and the charm of youth and beauty heightened to a considerable degree, work together on the same evening, it is an occasion to which no other can compare. But, even when part is bad and part is good, it is still better than looking out of the window, or playing a game of whist in a close party amid the smoke of cigars. The theater at Weimar is, as you feel, by no means to be despised; it is still an old trunk from our best time, to which new and fresh talents have attacht themselves; and we can still produce something which charms and pleases, and at least gives the appearance of an organized whole."

"Would I had seen it twenty or thirty years ago!" answered I.

"That was certainly a time," replied Goethe, "when we were assisted by great advantages. Consider that the tedious period of the French taste had not long gone by; that the public was not yet spoiled by overexcitement; that the influence of Shakspere was in all its first freshness; that the operas of Mozart were new; and, lastly, that

the pieces of Schiller were first produced here year after year, and were given at the theater of Weimar in all their first glory, under his own superintendence. Consider all this, I say, and you will imagine that, with such dishes, a fine banquet was given to old and young, and that we always had a grateful public."

I remarkt, "Older persons, who lived in those times, cannot praise highly enough the elevated position which the Weimar theater then held."

"I will not deny that it was of some account," returned Goethe. "The main point, however, was this, that the Grand Duke left my hands quite free, and I could do just as I likt. I did not look to magnificent scenery, and a brilliant wardrobe, but I lookt to good pieces. From tragedy to farce, every species was welcome; but a piece was obliged to have something in it to find favor. It was necessary that it should be great and clever, cheerful and graceful, and, at all events, healthy and containing some pith. All that was morbid, weak, lachrymose and sentimental, as well as all that was frightful, horrible and offensive to decorum, was utterly

excluded; I should have feared, by such expedients, to spoil both actors and audience.

"By means of good pieces I educated the actors; for the study of excellence, and the perpetual practice of excellence, must necessarily make something of a man whom nature has not left ungifted. I was, also, constantly in personal contact with the actors. I attended the readings of plays, and explained to every one his part; I was present at the chief rehearsals, and talkt with the actors as to any improvements that might be made; I was never absent from a performance, and pointed out the next day anything which did not appear to me to be right. By these means I advanced them in their art. But I also sought to raise the whole class in the esteem of society by introducing the best and most promising into my own circle, and thus showing to the world that I considered them worthy of social intercourse with myself. The result of this was that the rest of the higher society in Weimar did not remain behind me, and that actors and actresses gained soon an honorable admission into the best circles. By all this they acquired a great personal as well as external culture. My

pupil Wolff, in Berlin, and our Dürand are people of the finest tact in society. Oels and Graff have enough of the higher order of culture to do honor to the best circles.

“Schiller proceeded in the same spirit as myself. He had a great deal of intercourse with actors and actresses. He, like me, was present at every rehearsal; and after every successful performance of one of his pieces, it was his custom to invite the actors, and to spend a merry day with them. All rejoiced together at that which had succeeded, and discuss how anything might be done better next time. But even when Schiller joined us, he found both actors and the public already cultivated to a high degree; and it is not to be denied that this conduced to the rapid success of his pieces.”

It gave me great pleasure to hear Goethe speak so circumstantially upon a subject which always possest great interest for me, and which, in consequence of the misfortune of the previous night, was uppermost in my mind.

“This burning of the house,” said I, “in which you and Schiller, during a long course of years, effected so much good, in some de-

gree closes a great epoch, which will not soon return for Weimar. You must at that time have experienced great pleasure in your direction of the theater and its extraordinary success."

"And not a little trouble and difficulty," returned Goethe with a sigh.

"It must be difficult," said I, "to keep such a many-headed being in proper order."

"A great deal," said Goethe, "may be done by severity, more by love, but most by clear discernment and impartial justice, which pays no respect to persons.

"I had to beware of two enemies, which might have been dangerous to me. The one was my passionate love of talent, which might easily have made me partial. The other I will not mention, but you can guess it. At our theater there was no want of ladies, who were beautiful and young, and who were possest of great mental charms. I felt a passionate inclination towards many of them, and sometimes it happened that I was met half way. But I restrained myself, and said, No further! I knew my position, and also what I owed to it. I stood here, not as a private man, but as chief of an establish-

ment, the prosperity of which was of more consequence to me than a momentary gratification. If I had involved myself in any love affair, I should have been like a compass, which cannot possibly point right, if it has a powerful magnet beside it."

Sunday, March 27th. . . . The conversation then turned upon actors, and much was said about the use and abuse of their powers.

"I have, during my long practice," said Goethe, "found that the main point is never to allow any play, or scarcely any opera, to be prepared for representation unless one can look forward with some certainty to a good success for years. No one sufficiently considers the expenditure of power, which is demanded for the preparation of a five-act play, or even an opera of equal length. Yes, my good friends, much is required before a singer has thoroly mastered a part thru all the scenes and acts, much more before the choruses go as they ought.

"And then, when a good play or a good opera has once been prepared for the stage, it should be represented at short intervals—

be allowed to run as long as it draws, and continues at all to fill the house. The same plan would be applicable to a good old play, or a good old opera, which has, perhaps, been long laid aside, and which now requires not a little fresh study to be reproduced with success. Such a representation should be repeated at short intervals, as frequently as the public shows any interest in it. The desire always to have something new, and to see only once, or at the most twice, a good play or opera, which has been studied with excessive pains, or even to allow the space of six or eight weeks to elapse between such repetitions, in which time a new study becomes necessary—all this is a real detriment to the theater, and an unpardonable misuse of the talents of the performers engaged in it."

Goethe appeared to consider this matter very important, and it seemed to lie so near his heart that he became more excited than, with his calm disposition, is often the case.

"In Italy," continued Goethe, "they perform the same opera every evening for four or six weeks, and the Italians—big children—by no means desire any change. The pol-

isht Parisian sees the classical plays of his great poets so often that he knows them by heart, and has a practist ear for the accentuation of every syllable. Here, in Weimar, they have done me the honor to perform my 'Iphigenia' and my 'Tasso,' but how often? Scarcely once in three or four years. The public finds them tedious. Very probably. The actors are not in practice to play the pieces, and the public is not accustomed to hear them. If, thru more frequent repetitions, the actors entered so much into the spirit of their parts that their representation gained life, as if it were not the result of study, but as tho everything flowed from their own hearts, the public would, assuredly, no longer remain uninterested and unmoved.

"I really had the illusion once upon a time that it was possible to form a German drama. Nay, I even fancied that I myself could contribute to it, and lay some foundation-stones for such an edifice. I wrote my 'Iphigenia' and my 'Tasso,' and thought, with a childish hope, that thus it might be brought about. But there was no emotion or excitement—all remained as it was before. If I had produced an effect, and met with applause,

I would have written a round dozen of such pieces as 'Iphigenia' and 'Tasso.' There was no deficiency of material. But, as I said, actors were wanting to represent such pieces with life and spirit, and a public was wanting to hear and receive them with sympathy."

Thursday, April 14th. This evening at Goethe's. Since conversations upon the theater and theatrical management were now the order of the day, I askt him upon what maxims he proceeded in the choice of a new member of the company.

"I can scarcely say," returned Goethe; "I had various modes of proceeding. If a striking reputation preceded the new actor, I let him act, and saw how he suited the others; whether his style and manner disturbed our *ensemble*, or whether he would supply a deficiency. If, however, he was a young man who had never trodden a stage before, I first considered his personal qualities; whether he had about him anything prepossessing or attractive, and, above all things, whether he had control over himself. For an actor who possesses no self-possession, and who cannot appear before a stranger in

his most favorable light, has, in any case, little talent. His whole profession requires continual self-concealment, and a continual existence in a foreign mask.

"If his appearance and his deportment pleased me, I made him read, in order to test the power and extent of his voice, as well as the capabilities of his mind. I gave him some sublime passage from a great poet, to see whether he was capable of feeling and expressing what was really great; then something passionate and wild, to prove his power. I then went to something markt by sense and smartness, something ironical and witty, to see how he treated such things, and whether he possest sufficient versatility. Then I gave him something in which was represented the pain of a wounded heart, the suffering of a great soul, that I might learn whether he had it in his power to express pathos.

"If he satisfied me in all these numerous particulars I had a well-grounded hope of making him a very important actor. If he appeared more capable in some particulars than in others, I remarkt the line to which he was most adapted. I also now knew his

weak points, and, above all, endeavored to work upon him so that he might strengthen and cultivate himself here. If I remarkt faults of dialect, and what are called provincialisms, I urged him to lay them aside, and recommended to him social intercourse and friendly practice with some member of the stage who was entirely free from them. I then askt him whether he could dance and fence; and if this were not the case, I would hand him over for some time to the dancing and fencing masters.

"If he were now sufficiently advanced to make his appearance, I gave him at first such parts as suited his individuality, and I desired nothing but that he should represent himself. If he now appeared to me of too fiery a nature, I gave him phlegmatic characters; if too calm and slow, I gave him fiery and hasty characters, that he might thus learn to lay aside himself and assume a foreign individuality."

The conversation turned upon the casting of plays, upon which Goethe made, among others, the following remarkable observations.

"It is a great error to think," said he, "that

an indifferent piece may be played by indifferent actors. A second or third-rate play can be incredibly improved by the employment of first-rate powers, and be made something really good. But if a second or third-rate play be performed by second or third-rate actors, no one can wonder if it is utterly ineffective. Second-rate actors are excellent in great plays. They have the same effect that the figures in half shade have in a picture; they serve admirably to show off more powerfully those which have the full light."

Wednesday, April 20th. A poet who writes for the stage must have a knowledge of the stage, that he may weigh the means at his command, and know what is to be done, and what is to be left alone; the opera-composer, in like manner, should have some insight into poetry, that he may know how to distinguish the bad from the good, and not apply his art to something impracticable.

"Carl Maria von Weber," said Goethe, "should not have composed 'Euryanthe.' He should have seen at once that this was a bad material, of which nothing could be made. So much insight we have a right to expect of every composer, as belonging to his art."

Thus, too, the painter should be able to distinguish subjects; for it belongs to his department to know what he has to paint, and what to leave unpainted.

“But when all is said,” observed Goethe, “the greatest art is to limit and isolate oneself.”

Friday, April 29th. The building of the new theater up to this time had advanced very rapidly; the foundation walls had already risen on every side, and gave promise of a very beautiful building.

But to-day, on going to the site of the building, I saw, to my horror, that the work was discontinued; and I heard it reported that another party, opposed to Goethe and Cowdray's plan, had at last triumphed; that Cowdray had retired from the direction of the building, and that another architect was going to finish it after a new design, and alter accordingly the foundation already laid.

I was deeply grieved at what I saw and heard, for I had rejoiced, with many others, at the prospect of seeing a theater arise in Weimar executed according to Goethe's practical view of a judicious internal arrange-

ment, and, as far as beauty was concerned, in accordance with his cultivated taste.

But I also grieved for Goethe and Cowdray, who must both, more or less, feel hurt by this event.

Sunday, May 1st. Dined with Goethe. It may be supposed that the alteration in the building of the theater was the first subject we talkt upon. I had, as I said, feared that this most unexpected measure would deeply wound Goethe's feelings; but there was no sign of it. I found him in the mildest and most serene frame of mind, quite raised above all sensitive bitterness. . . .

"The Grand Duke," said Goethe, "disclosed to me his opinion that a theater need not be of architectural magnificence, which could, in general, not be contradicted. He further said that it was nothing but a house for the purpose of getting money. This view appears at first sight rather material; but, rightly considered, it is not without a higher purport. For if a theater is not only to pay its expenses, but is, besides, to make and save money, everything about it must be excellent. It must have the best management at its head; the actors must be of the best; and

good pieces must continually be performed, that the attractive power required to draw a full house every evening may never cease. But that is saying a great deal in a few words—almost what is impossible."

"The Grand Duke's view," said I, "of making the theater gain money appears to be very practical, since it implies a necessity of remaining continually on a summit of excellence."

"Even Shakspere and Molière," returned Goethe, "had no other view. Both of them wisht, above all things, to make money by their theaters. In order to attain this, their principal aim, they necessarily strove that everything should be as good as possible, and that, besides good old plays, there should be some clever novelty to please and attract. The prohibition of 'Tartuffe' was a thunder-bolt to Molière; but not so much for the poet as for the director Molière, who had to consider the welfare of an important troupe, and to find some means to procure bread for himself and his actors.

"Nothing," continued Goethe, "is more dangerous to the well-being of a theater than when the director is so placed that a greater

or less receipt at the treasury does not affect him personally, and he can live on in careless security, knowing that, however the receipts at the treasury may fail in the course of the year, at the end of that time he will be able to indemnify himself from another source. It is a property of human nature soon to relax when not impelled by personal advantage or disadvantage. Now, it is not desirable that a theater, in such a town as Weimar, should support itself, and that no contribution from the Prince's treasury should be necessary. But still everything has its bounds and limits, and a thousand thalers yearly, more or less, is by no means a trifling matter, particularly as diminisht receipts and deteriorations are dangers natural to a theater; so that there is a loss not only of money, but also of honor.

"If I were the Grand Duke, I would in future, on any change in the management, once for all appoint a fixt sum for an annual contribution. I would strike the average of the contributions during the last ten years, and according to that I would settle a sum sufficient to be regarded as a proper support. With this sum the house would have to be

run. But then I would go a step further, and say, that if the director and his stage-managers contrived, by means of judicious and energetic management, to have an overplus in the treasury at the end of the year, this overplus should be shared, as a remuneration, between the director, the stage-managers, and the principal members of the company. Then you would see what activity there would be, and how the establishment would awaken out of the drowsiness into which it must gradually fall.

"Our theatrical laws," continued Goethe, "contain various penalties; but there is no single law for the encouragement and reward of distinguisht merit. This is a great defect. For if, with every failure, I have a prospect of a deduction from my salary, I should also have the prospect of a reward, whenever I do more than can be properly expected of me. And it is by every one's doing more than can be hoped or expected of him that a theater attains excellence."

We walkt up and down the garden, enjoying the fine weather; we then sat upon a bench with our backs against the young leaves of a thick hedge. We spoke about

the bow of Ulysses, about the heroes of Homer, then about the Greek tragic poets, and lastly about the widely diffused opinion that Euripides caused the decline of the Greek drama. Goethe was by no means of this opinion.

“Altogether,” said he, “I am opposed to the view that any single man can cause the decline of an art. Much, which it is not so easy to set forth, must co-operate to this end. The decline of the tragic art of the Greeks could no more have been caused by Euripides than could that of sculpture by any great sculptor who lived in the time of Phidias, but was inferior to him. For when an epoch is great, it proceeds in the path of improvement, and an inferior production is without results. But what a great epoch was the time of Euripides! It was the time, not of a retrograde, but of a progressive taste. Sculpture had not yet reached its highest point, and painting was still in its infancy.

“If the pieces of Euripides, compared with those of Sophocles, had great faults, it was not necessary that succeeding poets should imitate these faults, and be spoilt by them. But if they had great merits, so that some

of them were even preferable to plays of Sophocles, why did not succeeding poets strive to imitate their merits; and why did they not thus become at least as great as Euripides himself? But if after the three celebrated tragic poets, there appeared no equally great fourth, fifth, or sixth—this is, indeed, a matter difficult to explain; nevertheless, we may have our own conjectures, and approach the truth in some degree.

“Man is a simple being. And however rich, varied, and unfathomable he may be, the cycle of his conditions is soon run through.

“If the same circumstances had occurred, as with us poor Germans, for whom Lessing has written two or three, I myself three or four, and Schiller five or six passable plays, there might easily have been room for a fourth, fifth, and sixth tragic poet.

“But with the Greeks and the abundance of their productions—for each of the three great poets has written a hundred or nearly a hundred pieces, and the tragical subjects of Homer, and the heroic traditions, were some of them treated three or four times—with such abundance of existing works, I say, one

can well imagine that by degrees, subjects were exhausted, and that any poet who followed the three great ones would be puzzled how to proceed.

“And, indeed, for what purpose should he write? Was there not, after all, enough for a time? And were not the productions of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides of that kind and of that depth that they might be heard again and again without being esteemed trite or put on one side? Even the few noble fragments which have come down to us are so comprehensive and of such deep significance that we poor Europeans have already busied ourselves with them for centuries, and shall find nutriment and work in them for centuries still.”

Thursday, May 12th. Goethe spoke with much enthusiasm of Menander. “I know no one, after Sophocles,” said he, “whom I love so well. He is thoroughly pure, noble, great, and cheerful, and his grace is unattainable. It is certainly to be lamented that we possess so little of him, but that little is invaluable, and highly instructive to gifted men.

“The great point is, that he from whom we would learn should be congenial to our

nature. Now, Calderon, for instance, great as he is, and much as I admire him, has exerted no influence over me for good or for ill. But he would have been dangerous to Schiller—he would have led him astray; and hence it is fortunate that Calderon was not generally known in Germany until after Schiller's death. Calderon is infinitely great in the technical and theatrical; Schiller, on the contrary, far more sound, earnest, and great in his intentions, and it would have been a pity if he had lost any of these virtues, without, after all, attaining to the greatness of Calderon in other respects."

We spoke of Molière. "Molière," said Goethe, "is so great, that one is astonisht anew every time one reads him. He is a man by himself—his pieces border on tragedy; they are entralling; and no one has the courage to imitate them. His 'Avare,' where vice destroys all the natural piety between father and son, is especially great, and in a high sense tragic. But when, in a German paraphrase, the son is changed into a relation, the whole is weakened, and loses its significance. They feared to show vice in its true nature, as he did; but what is tragic

there, or indeed anywhere, except what is intolerable?

"I read some pieces of Molière's every year, just as, from time to time, I contemplate the engravings after the great Italian masters. For we little men are not able to retain the greatness of such things within ourselves; we must therefore return to them from time to time and renew our impressions.

"People are always talking about originality; but what do they mean? As soon as we are born, the world begins to work upon us, and this goes on to the end. And, after all, what can we call our own except energy, strength, and will? If I could give an account of all that I owe to great predecessors and contemporaries, there would be but a small balance in my favor."

Sunday, December 25th. Goethe then showed me a very important English work, which illustrated all Shakspere in copper plates. Each page embraced, in six small designs, one piece with some verses written beneath, so that the leading idea and the most important situations of each work were brought before the eyes. All these immortal

tragedies and comedies thus past before the mind like processions of masks.

"It is even terrifying," said Goethe, "to look thru these little pictures. Thus are we first made to feel the infinite wealth and grandeur of Shakspere. There is no motive in human life which he has not exhibited and express! And all with what ease and freedom! But we cannot talk about Shakspere; everything is inadequate. I have toucht upon the subject in my 'Wilhelm Meister,' but that is not saying much. He is not a theatrical poet; he never thought of the stage; it was far too narrow for his great mind: nay, the whole visible world was too narrow. He is even too rich and too powerful. A productive nature ought not to read more than one of his dramas in a year if it would not be wrecked entirely. I did well to get rid of him by writing 'Götz von Berlichingen' and 'Egmont,' and Byron did well by not having too much respect for him, but going his own way. How many excellent Germans have been ruined by him and Calderon!

"Shakspere gives us golden apples in silver dishes. We get, indeed, the silver dishes by

studying his works; but, unfortunately, we have only potatoes to put into them."

I laugh, and was delighted with this admirable simile.

Goethe then read me a letter from Zelter, describing a representation of 'Macbeth' at Berlin, where the music could not keep pace with the grand spirit and character of the piece, as Zelter set forth by various intimations. By Goethe's reading, the letter gained its full effect, and he often paused to admire with me the point of some single passage.

"'Macbeth,' said Goethe, "I consider Shakspere's best acting play, the one in which he shows most understanding with respect to the stage. But would you see his mind unfettered, read 'Troilus and Cressida,' where he treats the materials of the 'Iliad' in his own fashion."

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Sunday, January 29th.—The conversation now turned upon the theater, and the weak, sentimental, gloomy character of modern productions.

“Molière is my strength and consolation at present,” said I; “I have translated his ‘Avare,’ and am now busy with his ‘Médicin malgré lui.’ Molière is indeed a great, a real (*reiner*) man.”

“Yes,” said Goethe, “a real man; that is the proper term. There is nothing distorted about him. And such greatness! He ruled the manners of his day, while, on the contrary, our Iffland and Kotzebue allowed themselves to be ruled by theirs, and were limited and confined in them. Molière chastised men by drawing them just as they were.”

“I would give something,” said I, “to see his plays acted in all their purity! Yet such things are much too strong and natural for the public, so far as I am acquainted with it.

Is not this over-refinement to be attributed to the so-called ideal literature of certain authors?"

"No," said Goethe, "it has its source in society itself. What business have our young girls at the theater? They do not belong to it—they belong to the convent; and the theater is only for men and women, who know something of human affairs. When Molière wrote, girls were in the convent, and he was not forced to think about them. But since we cannot get rid of these young girls nowadays, and pieces which are weak and therefore suited to girls continue to be produced, be wise and stay away, as I do. I was really interested in the theater only so long as I could have a practical influence upon it. It was my delight to bring the establishment to a high degree of perfection; and when there was a performance, my interest was not so much in the pieces as in observing whether the actors played as they ought. The faults I wisht to point out I sent in writing to the stage-manager, and was sure they would be avoided on the next representation. Now that I can no longer have any practical influence in the theater I feel

no call to enter it; I should be forced to endure defects without being able to amend them; and that would not suit me. And with the reading of plays, it is no better. The young German poets are eternally sending me tragedies; but what am I to do with them? I have never read German plays except with the view of seeing whether I could have them acted; in every other respect they were indifferent to me. What am I to do now, in my present situation, with the pieces of these young people? I can gain nothing for myself by reading how things ought not to be done; and I cannot assist the young poets in a matter which is already finisht. If, instead of their printed plays, they would send me the plan of a play, I could at least say, 'Do it,' or 'Leave it alone,' or 'Do it this way,' or 'Do it that'; and in this there might be some use."

Wednesday, July 26th. This evening I had the pleasure of hearing Goethe say a great deal about the theater.

I told him that one of my friends intended to arrange Lord Byron's 'Two Foscari' for the stage. Goethe doubted his success.

"It is indeed a temptation," he said. "When a piece makes a deep impression on us in reading, we think it will do the same on the stage, and that we could obtain such a result with little trouble. But this is by no means the case. A piece that is not originally, by the intent and skill of the poet, written for the boards will not succeed; but whatever is done to it will always remain somewhat unmanageable and unacceptable. What trouble have I taken with my 'Götz von Berlichingen!' yet it will not go right as an acting play, but is too long; and I have been forced to divide it into two parts, of which the last is indeed theatrically effective, while the first is to be lookt upon as a mere introduction. If the first part were given only once as an introduction, and then the second repeatedly, it might succeed. It is the same with 'Wallenstein': the 'Piccolomini' does not bear repetition, but 'Wallenstein's Death' is always seen with delight."

I asked how a piece must be constructed so as to be fit for the theater.

"It must be symbolical," replied Goethe; "that is to say, each incident must be significant in itself, and lead to another still

more important. The 'Tartuffe' of Molière is, in this respect, a great example. Only think what an exposition the first scene is! From the very beginning everything is highly significant, and leads us to expect something still more important which is to come. The exposition of Lessing's 'Minna von Barnhelm' is also admirable; but that of the 'Tartuffe' comes only once into the world: it is the greatest and best thing that exists of the kind."

We then came to the pieces of Calderon. "In Calderon," said Goethe, "you find the same perfect adaptation to the theater. His pieces are throughout fit for the boards; there is not a touch in them which is not directed towards the required effect. Calderon is a genius who had also the finest understanding."

"It is singular," said I, "that the dramas of Shakspere are not theatrical pieces, properly so called, since he wrote them all for his theater."

"Shakspere," replied Goethe, "wrote those pieces direct from his own nature. Then, too, his age, and the existing arrangements of the stage, made no demands upon him;

people were forced to put up with whatever he gave them. But if Shakspere had written for the court of Madrid, or for the theater of Louis XIV, he would probably have adapted himself to a severer theatrical form. This, however, is by no means to be regretted, for what Shakspere has lost as a theatrical poet he has gained as a poet in general. Shakspere is a great psychologist, and we learn from his pieces the secrets of human nature."

We then talked of the difficulties in managing a theater.

"The difficulty of it," said Goethe, "is so to deal with contingencies that we are not tempted to deviate from our higher maxims. Among the higher maxims is this: to keep a good repertory of excellent tragedies, operas, and comedies, which can be adhered to, and which may be regarded as permanent. Among contingencies, I reckon a new piece about which the public is anxious, a starring engagement, and so forth. We must not be led astray by things of this kind, but always return to our repertory. Our time is so rich in really good pieces that nothing is easier to one who knows how than to form a good

repertory; but nothing is more difficult than to maintain one.

"When Schiller and I superintended the theater, we had the great advantage of playing through the summer at Lauchstedt. There we had a select audience, who would have nothing but what was excellent; so we always returned to Weimar thoroly practised in the best plays, and could repeat all our summer performances in the winter. Besides, the Weimar public had confidence in our management, and, even in the case of things they could not appreciate, they were convinced that we acted in accordance with some higher view.

"When the nineties began," continued Goethe, "the proper period of my interest in the theater was already past, and I wrote nothing for the stage, but wisht to devote myself to epic poetry. Schiller revived my extinct interest, and, for the sake of his works, I again took part in the theater. At the time of my 'Clavigo,' I could easily have written a dozen theatrical pieces. I had no want of subjects, and production was easy to me. I might have written a piece every week, and I am sorry I did not."

Wednesday, November 8th. To-day, Goethe spoke again of Lord Byron with admiration. "I have," said he, "read once more his 'Deformed Transformed,' and must say that to me his talent appears greater than ever. His devil was suggested by my Mephistophiles; but it is no imitation—it is thoroly new and original, and everywhere compact, genuine, and spirited. There are no weak passages—not a place where you could put the head of a pin, where you do not find invention and thought. Were it not for his hypochondriacal negative turn, he would be as great as Shakspere and the ancients."

Wednesday, December 20th. The Berlin papers were brought in, and Goethe sat down to read them. He handed one of them to me, and I found in the theatrical intelligence that at the opera house and the theater royal they gave just as bad pieces as they gave here. "How should it be otherwise?" said Goethe. "There is no doubt that with the help of good English, French and Spanish pieces, a repertory can be formed sufficiently abundant to furnish a good piece every evening. But what need is felt by the nation al-

ways to see good pieces? The time in which Æschylus, Sophocles—and Euripides wrote was different. Then there was mind enough to desire only what was really greatest and best. But in our miserable times, where is felt a need for the best? Where are the organs to appreciate it?

“And then,” continued Goethe, “people wish to have something new. In Berlin or Paris, the public is always the same. A quantity of new pieces are written and brought out in Paris, and you must endure five or six thoroly bad ones before you are compensated by a single good one. The only expedient to keep up a German theater at the present time is that of starring. If I had the direction of a theater now, the whole winter should be provided with excellent stars. Thus, not only would all the good pieces be repeated, but the interest of the audience would be led more from the pieces to the acting; a power of comparing and judging would be acquired; the public would gain in penetration, and the superior acting of a distinguished star would maintain our own actors in a state of excitement and emulation. As I said before, keep on with your star-

ring, and you will be astonisht at the benefit that will accrue both to the theater and the public. I foresee a time when a clever man, who understands the matter, will take four theaters at once, and provide them with stars by turn. And I am sure he will keep his ground better with these four than if he had only one."

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Wednesday, January 17th. We talkt of Schiller's 'Fiesco,' which was acted last Saturday. "I saw it for the first time," said I, "and have been much occupied with thinking whether those extremely rough scenes could not be softened; but I find very little could be done to them without spoiling the character of the whole."

"You are right—it cannot be done," replied Goethe. "Schiller often talkt with me on the matter; for he himself could not endure his first plays, and would never allow them to be acted while he had the direction of the theater. At last we were in want of pieces, and would willingly have gained those three powerful firstlings for our repertory. But we found it impossible; all the parts were too closely interwoven one with another; so that Schiller himself despaired of accomplishing the plan, and found himself constrained to give it up, and leave the pieces just as they were."

“ ‘Tis a pity,” said I; “for, notwithstanding all their roughness, I love them a thousand times better than the weak, forced, and unnatural pieces of some of the best of our later tragic poets. A grand intellect and character is felt in everything of Schiller’s.”

“Yes,” said Goethe, “Schiller might do what he would, he could not make anything which would not come out far greater than the best things of these later people. Even when he cut his nails, he showed he was greater than these gentlemen.” We laugh at this striking metaphor.

“But I have known persons,” continued he, “who could never be content with those first dramas of Schiller. One summer, at a bathing place, I was walking thru a very secluded, narrow path, which led to a mill. There Prince —— met me, and as at the same moment some mules laden with meal-sacks came up to us we were obliged to get out of the way and enter a small house. Here, in a narrow room, we fell, after the fashion of that prince, into deep discussion about things divine and human; we also came to Schiller’s ‘Robbers,’ when the prince express himself thus: ‘If I had been the Deity

on the point of creating the world, and had foreseen, at the moment, that Schiller's 'Robbers' would have been written in it, I would have left the world uncreated.' " We could not help laughing. "What do you say to that?" said Goethe; "that is a dislike which goes pretty far, and which one can scarcely understand."

"There is nothing of this dislike," I observed, "in our young people, especially our students. The most excellent and matured pieces by Schiller and others may be performed, and we shall see but few young people and students in the theater; but if Schiller's 'Robbers' or Schiller's 'Fiesco' is given, the house is almost filled by students alone."

"So it was," said Goethe, "fifty years ago, and so it will probably be fifty years hence. What a young man has written is always best enjoyed by young people. Do not let us imagine that the world will so much advance in culture and good taste that young people will pass over the ruder epoch. Even if the world progresses generally, youth will always begin at the beginning, and the epochs of the world's accomplishment will be repeated in the individual. This has ceased to ir-

ritate me, and a long time ago I made a verse in this fashion:

Still let the bonfire blaze away,
Let pleasure never know decay;
Old brooms to stumps are always worn,
And youngsters every day are born.

Wednesday, January 31st. We talkt of Alexander Manzoni; and Goethe told me that Count Reinhard, not long since, saw Manzoni at Paris, where, as a young author of celebrity, he had been well received in society, and that he was now living happily on his estate, in the neighborhood of Milan, with a young family and his mother.

“Manzoni,” continued he, “lacks nothing except to know what a good poet he is, and what rights belong to him as such. He has too much respect for history, and on this account is always adding notes to his pieces, in which he shows how faithful he has been to detail. Now, tho his facts may be historical his characters are not so, any more than my ‘Thoas’ and ‘Iphigenia.’ No poet has ever known the historical characters which he has painted; if he had, he could scarcely have made use of them. The poet must know what effects he wishes to produce, and

regulate the nature of his characters accordingly. If I had tried to make Egmont as history represents him, the father of a dozen children, his light-minded proceedings would have appeared very absurd. I needed an Egmont more in harmony with his own actions and my poetic views; and this is, as Clärchen says, my Egmont.

"What would be the use of poets if they only repeated the record of the historian? The poet must go farther, and give us, if possible, something higher and better. All the characters of Sophocles bear something of that great poet's lofty soul; and it is the same with the characters of Shakspere. This is as it ought to be. Nay, Shakspere goes farther, and makes his Romans Englishmen; and there, too, he is right; for otherwise his nation would not have understood him.

"Here, again," continued Goethe, "the Greeks were so great that they regarded fidelity to historic facts less than the treatment of them by the poet. We have, fortunately, a fine example in Philoctetes, which subject has been treated by all three of the great tragedians, and last and best by Sophocles."

Thursday, February 1st. Goethe had a volume of the 'Theory of Colors' before him.

I read as far as those interesting paragraphs where it is taught that the eye has need of change, since it never willingly dwells on the same color, but always requires another, and that so urgently that it produces colors itself if it does not actually find them.

This remark led our conversation to a great law which pervades all nature, and on which all life and all the joy of life depend. "This," said Goethe, "is the case not only with all our other senses, but also with our higher spiritual nature; and it is because the eye is so eminent a sense, that this 'law of required change' is so striking and so especially clear with respect to colors. We have dances which please us in a high degree on account of the alteration of major and minor, while dances in only one of these modes weary us at once."

"The same law," said I, "seems to lie at the foundation of a good style, where we like to avoid a sound which we have just heard. Even on the stage a great deal might be done with this law, if it were well applied.

Plays, especially tragedies, in which a uniform tone uninterrupted by change prevails, have always something wearisome about them; and if the orchestra plays melancholy, depressing music during the intermissions of a melancholy piece, we are tortured by an insupportable feeling, which we would escape by all possible means."

"Perhaps," said Goethe, "the lively scenes introduced into Shakspere's tragedies rest upon this 'law of required change,' but it does not seem applicable to the higher tragedy of the Greeks, where, on the contrary, a certain fundamental tone pervades the whole."

"The Greek tragedy," said I, "is not of such a length as to be rendered wearisome by one pervading tone. Then there is an interchange of chorus and dialog; and the sublime spirit is of such a kind that it cannot become fatiguing since a certain genuine reality, which is always of a cheerful nature, constantly underlies it."

"You may be right," said Goethe; "and it would be well worth the trouble to investigate how far the Greek tragedy is subject to the general 'law of required change.' You see how all things are connected with each

other, and how a law respecting the theory of colors can lead to an inquiry into Greek tragedy. We must only take care not to push such a law too far, and make it the foundation for much besides. We shall go more safely if we only apply it by analogy as an example."

Wednesday, February 7th. To-day Goethe spoke severely of certain critics who were not satisfied with Lessing, and made unjust demands upon him. "When people," said he, "compare the pieces of Lessing with those of the ancients, and call them paltry and miserable, what is one to say? Rather let us pity the extraordinary man for being obliged to live in a pitiful time, which afforded him no better materials than are treated in his pieces; pity him, because in his *Minna von Barnhelm*, he found nothing better to do than to occupy himself with the squabbles of Saxony and Prussia. His constant political turn, too, resulted from the badness of his time. In *'Emilia Galotti'*, he vented his pique against princes; in *'Nathan'*, against the priests."

Wednesday, March 28th. "When we," continued Goethe, "for our modern purposes,

wish to learn how to conduct ourselves upon the stage, Molière is the man to whom we should apply. Do you know his 'Malade Imaginaire'? There is a scene in it which, as often as I read the piece, appears to me the symbol of a perfect knowledge of the boards. I mean the scene where the 'Malade Imaginaire' asks his little daughter Louison if there has not been a young man in the chamber of her eldest sister. Now, any other who did not understand his craft so well would have let the little Louison plainly tell the fact at once, and there would have been the end of the matter.

"But what various motives for delay are introduced by Molière into this examination, for the sake of life and effect! He first makes the little Louison act as if she did not understand her father; then she denies that she knows anything; then, threatened with the rod, she falls down as if dead; then, when her father bursts out in despair, she springs up from her feigned swoon with roguish hilarity, and at last, little by little, she confesses all. My explanation can only give you a very meager notion of the animation of the scene; but read this scene your-

self till you become thoroly imprest with its theatrical worth, and you will confess that there is more practical instruction contained in it than in all the theories in the world.

“I have known and loved Molière,” continued Goethe, “from my youth, and have learned from him during my whole life. I never fail to read some of his plays every year, that I may keep up a constant intercourse with what is excellent. It is not merely the perfectly artistic treatment which delights me; but particularly the amiable nature, the highly formed mind, of the poet. There is in him a grace and a feeling for the decorous, and a tone of good society, which his innate beautiful nature could only attain by daily intercourse with the most eminent men of his age. Of Menander, I only know the few fragments; but these give me so high an idea of him, that I look upon this great Greek as the only man who could be compared to Molière.”

“I am happy,” returned I, “to hear you speak so highly of Molière. This sounds a little different from Herr von Schlegel! I have to-day, with great repugnance, swallowed what he says concerning Molière in

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his lectures on dramatic poetry. He quite looks down upon him as a vulgar buffoon who has only seen good society at a distance, and whose business it was to invent all sorts of farces for the amusement of his lord. In these low farces Schlegel admits he was most happy, but thinks he stole the best of them, that he was obliged to force himself into the higher school of comedy, and never succeeded in it."

"To a man like Schlegel," returned Goethe, "a genuine nature like Molière's is a veritable thorn in the eye; he feels that he has nothing in common with him, he cannot endure him. The 'Misanthrope,' which I read over and over again, as one of my most favorite pieces, is repugnant to him; he is forced to praise 'Tartuffe' a little, but he lets him down again as much as he can. Schlegel cannot forgive Molière for ridiculing the affectation of learned ladies; he feels, probably, as one of my friends has remarked, that he himself would have been ridiculed if he had lived with Molière.

"It is not to be denied," continued Goethe, "that Schlegel knows a great deal, and one is almost terrified at his extraordinary at-

tainments and his extensive reading. But this is not enough. All the learning in the world is still no judgment. His criticism is completely one-sided, because in all theatrical pieces he merely regards the skeleton of the plot and arrangement, and only points out small points of resemblance to great predecessors, without troubling himself in the least as to what the author brings forward of graceful life and the culture of a noble soul. But of what use are all the arts of a talent if we do not find in a theatrical piece an amiable or great personality of the author? This alone influences the cultivation of the people. I look upon the manner in which Schlegel has treated the French drama as a sort of recipe for the formation of a bad critic, who is wanting in every organ for the veneration of excellence, and who passes over a sound nature and a great character as if they were chaff and stubble."

"Shakspere and Calderon, on the other hand," I replied, "he treats justly, and even with decided affection."

"Both," returned Goethe, "are of such a kind that one cannot say enough in praise of them, altho I should not have wondered if

Schlegel had scornfully depreciated them also. Thus he is also just to Æschylus and Sophocles; but this does not seem to arise so much from a lively conviction of their extraordinary merit as from the tradition among philologists to place them both very high; for, in fact, Schlegel's own little person is not sufficient to comprehend and adequately to appreciate such lofty natures. If this had been the case, he would have been just to Euripides too, and would have gone to work with him in a different manner. But he knows that philologists do not estimate him very highly, and he therefore feels no little delight that he is permitted, upon such high authority, to fall foul of this mighty ancient, and to schoolmaster him as much as he can. I do not deny that Euripides has his faults; but he was always a very respectable competitor with Sophocles and Æschylus. If he did not possess the great earnestness and the severe artistic completeness of his two predecessors, and as a dramatic poet treated things a little more leniently and humanely, he probably knew his Athenians well enough to be aware that the chord which he struck was the right one for his contemporaries.

A poet whom Socrates called his friend, whom Aristotle lauded, whom Menander admired, and for whom Sophocles and the city of Athens put on mourning on hearing of his death, must certainly have amounted to something. If a modern man like Schlegel must pick out faults in so great an ancient, he ought only to do it upon his knees."

* Sunday, April 1st. In the evening with Goethe. I converst with him upon the yesterday's performance of his 'Iphigenia,' in which Herr Krüger, from the Theater Royal at Berlin, played Orestes with great applause.

"The piece," said Goethe, "has its difficulties. It is rich in internal but poor in external life; the point is to make the internal life come out. It is full of the most effective means, arising from the various horrors which form the foundation of the piece. The printed words are indeed only a faint reflex of the life which stirred within me during the composition of the piece, but the actor must bring us back to this first fire which animated the poet with respect to his subject. We wish to see the vigorous Greeks and heroes, with the fresh sea-breezes blow-

ing upon them, who, oppressed and tormented by various ills and dangers, speak out strongly as their hearts prompt them. But we want none of those feeble, sentimental actors who have only just learned their part by rote, and least of all do we want those who are not even perfect in their parts.

“I must confess that I have never succeeded in witnessing a perfect representation of my ‘Iphigenia.’ That was the reason why I did not go yesterday; for I suffer dreadfully when I have to do with these specters who do not manifest themselves as they ought.” . . .

“An actor,” said Goethe, “should properly go to school to a sculptor and a painter; for, in order to represent a Greek hero, it is necessary for him to study carefully the antique sculptures which have come down to us, and to impress on his mind the natural grace of their sitting, standing, and walking. But the merely bodily is not enough. He must also, by diligent study of the best ancient and modern authors, give a great cultivation to his mind. This will not only assist him to understand his part, but will also give a higher tone to his whole being and his

whole deportment.* But tell me more! What else did you see good in him?"

"It appeared to me," said I, "that he posses great love for his subject. He had by diligent study made every detail clear to himself, so that he lived and moved in his hero with great freedom; and nothing remained which he had not made entirely his own. Thence arose a just expression and a just accentuation for every word, together with such certainty, that the prompter was for him a quite superfluous person."

"I am pleased with this," said Goethe; "this is as it ought to be.* Nothing is more dreadful than when the actors are not masters of their parts, and at every new sentence must listen to the prompter. By this their acting becomes a mere nullity, without any life and power. When the actors are not perfect in their parts in a piece like my 'Iphigenia,' it is better not to play it; for the piece can have success only when all goes surely, rapidly, and with animation.* However, I am glad that it went off so well with Krüger. Zelter recommended him to me, and I should have been annoyed if he had not turned out so well as he has. I will have

a little joke with him, and will present him with a prettily bound copy of my 'Iphigenia,' with some verses inscribed in reference to his acting."

The conversation then turned upon the 'Antigone' of Sophocles, and the high moral tone prevailing in it; and, lastly, upon the question—how the moral element came into the world?

"Thru God himself," returned Goethe, "like everything else which is good. It is no product of human reflection, but a beautiful natural quality inherent and inborn. It is, more or less, inherent in mankind generally, but to a high degree in a few eminently gifted minds. These have, by great deeds or doctrines, manifested their divine nature; which, then, by the beauty of its appearance, won the love of men, and powerfully attracted them to reverence and emulation."

"A consciousness of the worth of the morally beautiful and good could be attained by experience and wisdom, inasmuch as the bad showed itself in its consequences as a destroyer of happiness, both in individuals and the whole body, while the noble and right seemed to produce and secure the happiness

of one and all. Thus the morally beautiful could become a doctrine, and diffuse itself over whole nations as something plainly express."

"I have lately read somewhere," answered I, "the opinion that the Greek tragedy had made moral beauty a special object."

"Not so much morality," returned Goethe, "as pure humanity in its whole extent; especially in such positions where, by falling into contact with rude power, it could assume a tragic character. In this region, indeed, even the moral stood as a principal part of human nature. The morality of Antigone, besides, was not invented by Sophocles, but was contained in the subject, which Sophocles chose the more readily, as it united so much dramatic effect with moral beauty."

Goethe then spoke about the characters of Creon and Ismene, and on the necessity of these two persons for the development of the beautiful soul of the heroine.

"All that is noble," said he, "is in itself of a quiet nature, and appears to sleep until it is aroused and summoned forth by contrast. Such a contrast is Creon, who is brought in, partly on account of Antigone,

in order that her noble nature and the right which is on her side may be brought out by him, partly on his own account, in order that his unhappy error may appear odious to us.

"But, as Sophocles meant to display the elevated soul of his heroine even before the deed, another contrast was requisite by which her character might be developed; and this is her sister Ismene. In this character the poet has given us a beautiful standard of the commonplace, so that the greatness of Antigone, which is far above such a standard, is the more strikingly visible."

The conversation then turned upon dramatic authors in general, and upon the important influence which they exerted, and could exert, upon the great mass of the people.

"A great dramatic poet," said Goethe, "if he is at the same time productive, and is actuated by a strong, noble purpose, which pervades all his works, may succeed in making the soul of his pieces become the soul of the people. I should think that this was something well worth the trouble. From Corneille proceeded an influence capable of forming heroes. This was something for

Napoleon, who had need of an heroic people; on which account, he said of Corneille that if he were still living he would make a prince of him. A dramatic poet who knows his vocation should therefore work incessantly at its higher development, in order that his influence on the people may be noble and beneficial.

“One should not study contemporaries and competitors, but the great men of antiquity, whose works have, for centuries, received equal homage and consideration. Indeed, a man of really superior endowments will feel the necessity of this, and it is just this need for an intercourse with great predecessors, which is the sign of a higher talent. Let us study Molière, let us study Shakspere, but above all things, the old Greeks, and always the Greeks.”

Wednesday, April 18th. At dinner we were very cheerful. . . .

“I will treat you to something good, by way of dessert,” said Goethe. With these words he placed before me a landscape by Rubens.

“You have,” said he, “already seen this picture; but one cannot look often enough

at anything really excellent;—besides, there is something very particular attacht to this. Will you tell me what you see?"

"I begin from the distance," said I. "I see in the remotest background a very clear sky, as if after sunset. Then, still in the extreme distance, a village and a town, in the light of evening. In the middle of the picture there is a road, along which a flock of sheep is hastening to the village. At the right hand of the picture are several haystacks, and a wagon which appears well laden. *Unharnessed horses are grazing near. On one side, among the bushes, are several mares with their foals, which appear as tho they were going to remain out of doors all night. Then, nearer to the foreground, there is a group of large trees; and lastly, quite in the foreground to the top, there are various laborers returning homewards."

But," continued I with surprise, "the figures cast their shadows into the picture; the group of trees, on the contrary, cast theirs

*Obviously, as Oxenford notes, the proper word here, tho the text has 'angeschirrt'—'harnessed.'

towards the spectator. We thus have light from different sides, which is contrary to Nature."

"That is the point," returned Goethe with a smile. "It is by this that Rubens proves himself great, and shows to the world that he, with a free spirit, stands *above* Nature, and treats her unfavorably to his high purposes. The double light is certainly a violent expedient, and you are certainly justified in saying that it is contrary to Nature. But if it is contrary to Nature, I still say that it is superior to Nature; I say it is the bold stroke of the master, by which he, in a genial manner, proclaims to the world that art is not entirely subject to natural necessities, but has laws of its own." . . .

"Are there not," said I, "bold strokes of artistic fiction similar to this double light of Rubens to be found in literature?"

"We need not go far," said Goethe, after some reflection; "I could show you a dozen of them in Shakspere. Only take 'Macbeth.' When the lady would animate her husband to the deed, she says—

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.

Whether this be true or not does not appear; but the lady says it, and she must say it in order to give emphasis to her speech. But in the course of the piece, when Macduff hears of the account of the destruction of his family, he exclaims in wild rage—

He has no children!

These words of Macduff contradict those of Lady Macbeth; but this does not trouble Shakspere. The grand point with him is the force of each speech; and as the lady, in order to give the highest emphasis to her words, must say 'I have given suck,' so, for the same purpose, Macduff must say 'he has no children.'

"Generally," continued Goethe, "we must not judge too exactly and narrowly of the pencil touches of a painter, or the words of a poet; we should rather contemplate and enjoy a work of art that has been produced in a bold and free spirit, with the same spirit, if we possibly can. Thus it would be foolish, if, from the words of Macbeth—

Bring forth men children only!

the conclusion was drawn that the lady was a young creature who had not yet borne any

children. And it would be equally foolish if we were to go still further, and say that the lady must be represented on the stage as a very youthful person.

“Shakspere by no means makes Macbeth say these words to show the youth of the lady; but these words, like those of Lady Macbeth and Macduff, which I quoted just now, are merely introduced for rhetorical purposes, and prove nothing more than that the poet always makes his character say whatever is proper, effective, and good in each *particular place*, without troubling himself to calculate whether these words may, perhaps, fall into apparent contradiction with some other passage.

“Shakspere, in writing his pieces, could hardly have thought that they would appear in print, so as to be told over, and compared one with another; he had rather the stage in view when he wrote; he regarded his plays as a lively and moving scene, that would pass rapidly before the eyes and ears upon the stage, not as one that was to be held firmly, and carped at in detail. Hence, his only point

was to be effective and significant for the moment."

1829

Wednesday, February 4th. "If the Genasts stay here" [said Goethe], "I shall write two pieces for you, both in one act and in prose. One will be of the most cheerful kind, and end with a wedding; the other will be shocking and terrible, and two corpses will be on the stage at the end. The latter dates from Schiller's time, who wrote a scene of it at my request. I have long thought over both these subjects, and they are so completely present to my mind that I could dictate either of them in a week, as I did my 'Bürgergeneral.' "

"Do so," said I; "write the two pieces at all events; it will be a recreation to you after the 'Wanderjahre,' and will operate like a little journey. And how pleased the world would be, if, contrary to the expectation of every one, you did something more for the stage."

"As I said," continued Goethe, "if the Genasts stay here, I am not sure that I shall

not indulge in this little pleasantry. But without this prospect there is but small inducement; for a play upon paper is nought. The poet must know the means with which he has to work, and must adapt his characters to the actors who are to play them. If I can reckon upon Genast and his wife, and take besides La Roche, Herr Winterberger, and Madame Seidel, I know what I have to do, and can be certain that my intentions will be carried out.

“Writing for the stage,” he continued, “is an art by itself, and he who does not understand it thoroly had better leave it alone. Every one thinks that an interesting fact will appear interesting in the theater,—nothing of the kind! Things may be very pretty to read, and very pretty to think about; but as soon as they are put upon the stage the effect is quite different, and what has charmed us in the closet will probably fall flat on the boards. When one reads my ‘Hermann and Dorothea,’ he thinks it might be brought out at the theater. Töpfer has been inveigled into the experiment; but what is it, what effect does it produce, especially if it is not played in a first-rate manner, and who can

say that it is in every respect a good piece? Writing for the stage is a trade that one must understand, and requires a talent that one must possess. Both are uncommon, and where they are not combined, we shall scarcely have any good result."

Thursday, February 19th. Dined with Goethe alone in his study. . . . We talkt a great deal about 'Egmont,' which had been represented, according to Schiller's version, on the preceding evening, and the injury done to the piece by this version was brought under discussion.

"For many reasons," said I, "the Regent should not have been omitted; on the contrary, she is thoroly necessary to the piece. Not only does this princess impart to the whole a higher, nobler character, but the political relations especially of the Spanish court are brought much more clearly in view by her conversation with Machiavelli."

"Unquestionably," said Goethe. "And then Egmont gains in dignity from the luster which the partiality of this princess casts upon him, while Clärchen also seems exalted when we see that, vanquishing even princesses, she alone has all Egmont's love.

These are very delicate effects, which cannot be obliterated without compromising the whole."

"It seems to me, too," said I, "that where there are so many important male parts, a single female personage like Clärchen appears too weak and somewhat overpowered. By means of the Regent the picture is better balanced. It is not enough that the Regent is talked of; her personal entrance makes the impression."

"You judge rightly," said Goethe. "When I wrote the piece I well weighed everything, as you may imagine; and hence it is no wonder that the whole materially suffers, when a principal figure is torn out of it, which has been conceived for the sake of the whole, and thru which the whole exists. But Schiller had something violent in his nature; he often acted too much according to a preconceived idea, without sufficient regard to the subject which he had to treat."

"You may be blamed also," said I, "for allowing the alteration, and granting him such unlimited liberty in so important a matter."

"We often act more from indifference than kindness," replied Goethe. "Then, at that time, I was deeply occupied with other things. I had no interest for 'Egmont' or for the stage, so I let Schiller have his own way. Now it is, at any rate, a consolation for me that the work exists in print, and that there are theaters where people are wise enough to perform it, as I wrote it, without abbreviation."

1830

Sunday, February 14th.—We . . . spoke of the theater, and dramatic poetry.

“Gozzi,” said Goethe, “would maintain that there are only six-and-thirty tragical situations. Schiller took the greatest pains to find more, but he did not find even so many as Gozzi.”

Wednesday, February 17th.—We talked of the theater—of the color of the scenes and costumes. The result was as follows:—

Generally, the scenes should have a tone favorable to every color of the dresses, like Beuther’s scenery, which has more or less of a brownish tinge, and brings out the color of the dresses with perfect freshness. If, however, the scene-painter is obliged to depart from so favorable an undecided tone, and to represent a red or yellow chamber, a white tent or a green garden, the actors should be clever enough to avoid similar colors in their dresses. If an actor in a red uniform and green breeches enters a red

room, the upper part of his body vanishes, and only his legs are seen; if, with the same dress, he enters a green garden, his legs vanish, and the upper part of his body is conspicuous. Thus I saw an actor in a white uniform and dark breeches, the upper part of whose body completely vanisht in a white tent, while the legs disappeared against a dark background.

“Even,” said Goethe, “when the scene-painter is obliged to have a red or yellow chamber, or a green garden or wood, these colors should be somewhat faint and hazy, that every dress in the foreground may be relieved and produce the proper effect.”

Wednesday, March 17th.—This evening at Goethe’s for a couple of hours. By order of the Grand Duchess I brought him back “Gemma von Art,” and told him the good opinion I entertained of this piece.

“I am always glad,” returned he, “when anything is produced which is new in invention and bears the stamp of talent.” Then taking the volume between his hands, and looking at it somewhat askance, he added, “but I am never quite pleased when I see a dramatic author make pieces too long to be

represented as they are written. This imperfection takes away half the pleasure that I should otherwise feel. Only see what a thick volume this 'Gemma von Art' is."

"Schiller," returned I, "has not managed much better, and yet he is a very great dramatic author."

"He too has certainly committed this fault," returned Goethe. "His first pieces particularly, which he wrote in the fullness of youth, seem as if they would never end. He had too much on his mind, and too much to say to be able to control it. Afterwards, when he became conscious of this fault, he took infinite trouble, and endeavored to overcome it by work and study; but he never perfectly succeeded. It really requires a poetical giant, and is more difficult than is imagined, to control a subject properly, to keep it from overpowering one, and to concentrate one's attention on that alone which is absolutely necessary."

Tuesday, February 15th. Dined with Goethe. I told him about the theater; he praised the piece given yesterday—‘Henry III,’ by Dumas—as very excellent, but naturally found that such a dish would not suit the public.

“I should not,” said he, “have ventured to give it, when I was director; for I remember well what trouble we had to smuggle upon the public the ‘Constant Prince,’ which has far more general human interest, is more poetic, and in fact lies much nearer to us, than ‘Henry III.’ ”

I spoke of the ‘Grand Cophta,’ which I had been lately reperusing. I talked over the scenes one by one, and, at last, express a wish to see it once on the stage.

“I am pleased,” said Goethe, “that you like that piece, and find out what I have worked into it. It was indeed no little labor to make an entirely real fact first poetical, and then theatrical. And yet you will grant

that the whole is properly conceived for the stage. Schiller was, also, very partial to it; and we gave it once, with brilliant effect, for the higher order of persons. But it is not for the public in general; the crimes of which it treats have about them an *enthralling* character, which produces an uncomfortable feeling in the people. Its bold character places it, indeed, in the sphere of 'Clara Gazul'; and the French poet might really envy me for taking from him so good a subject. I say *so good a subject*, because it is in truth not merely of moral, but also of great historical significance; the fact immediately preceded the French Revolution, and was, to a certain extent, its foundation. The Queen, through being implicated in that unlucky story of the necklace, lost her dignity, and was no longer respected, so that she lost, in the eyes of the people, the ground where she was unassailable. Hate injures no one; it is contempt that casts men down. Kotzebue had been hated long; but before the student dared to use his dagger upon him it was necessary for certain journals to make him contemptible."

Thursday, December 1st. We then spoke of Victor Hugo, remarking that his too great fertility had been highly prejudicial to his talent.

"How can a writer help growing worse, and destroying the finest talent in the world," said Goethe, "if he has the audacity to write in a single year two tragedies and a novel; and, further, when he only appears to work in order to scrape together immense sums of money? I do not blame him for trying to become rich, and to earn present renown; but if he intends to live long in futurity, he must begin to write less and to work more."

Goethe then went thru 'Marie de Lorme,' and endeavored to make it clear to me that the subject only contained sufficient material to make one single good and really tragical act; but that the author had allowed himself, by considerations of quite a secondary nature, to be misled into stretching out his subject to five long acts. "Under these circumstances," said Goethe, "we have merely the advantage of seeing that the poet is great in the representation of details, which certainly is something, and indeed no trifle."

1832

March (no date). We talkt of the tragic idea of Destiny among the Greeks.

"It no longer suits our way of thinking," said Goethe, "it is obsolete, and is also in contradiction with our religious views. If a modern poet introduces such antique ideas into a drama, it always has an air of affectation. It is a costume which is long since out of fashion, and which, like the Roman toga, no longer suits us.

"It is better for us moderns to say with the poet, 'Politics is Destiny.' But let us beware of saying, with our latest literati, that politics is poetry, or a good subject for the poet. The English poet Thomson wrote a very good poem on the seasons, but a very bad one on liberty, and that not from want of poetry in the poet, but from want of poetry in the subject.

"If a poet would work politically, he must give himself up to a party; as soon as he does that, he is lost as a poet; he must bid

farewell to his free spirit, his unbiased view, and draw over his ears the cap of bigotry and blind hatred.

"The poet, as a man and a citizen, will love his native land; but the native land of his *poetic* powers is the good, the noble, the beautiful, which is confined to no particular province or country, and which he seizes upon and forms wherever he finds it. Therein is he like the eagle, who hovers with free gaze over whole countries, and to whom it is of no consequence whether the hare on which he pounces is running in Prussia or Saxony.

"And then, what is meant by love of one's country? What is meant by patriotic deeds? If the poet has employed a life in battling with pernicious prejudices, in setting aside narrow views, in enlightening the minds, purifying the tastes, ennobling the feelings and thoughts of his countrymen, what better could he have done? How could he have acted more patriotically?"

[*This is the last conversation recorded by Eckermann. Goethe died on March 22, 1832.*]

